

Men have choice of varied styles

No one trend finds the top of the heap

Normally, when we think of fashion, it's in terms of women's clothing. But this attitude is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. More and more men are giving serious consideration to the way they look.

Still, it's difficult to project long-range trends in menswear.

Taste in men's clothing is more fragmented than ever, which is a good deal for the customer, the guy who has to wear the dry goods turned out by the world's designers and manufacturers.

This means that nobody can point a finger at a man and tell him he's not wearing the "right" outfit for the occasion. Unless he shows up at his grandmother's funeral in something better suited for a date at an X-rated movie house.

Change has come over the years and, along the way, much of the junk has been discarded from menswear offerings. Doubtless more junk will be introduced — some in every season — but it doesn't last long.

Thus, in the search for something different from the button-down look of the '60s, a lot of trash has been thrown out.

Among the casualties is the once popular double knit. Baseball players still are wearing double knits (you'll still see some double knits at a few stores at greatly reduced prices).

But the hard, plastic-looking all-polyester double knits which can be picked out in a crowd from a low-flying plane are falling from popularity at Mach speed.

Going or gone with them are leisure suits, which someday will be right up there with the Edsel, cranberries and the Nehru jacket as one of the losers of the postwar era.

Gone also are wide neckties and lapels that once threatened to force a man to tuck so that he could make headway into the wind. Shirt collars have thinned, too.

Three-color shoes also

have gone the way of the dodo bird and the Indian head penny, in favor of more quiet footwear and heels that aren't stacked so high. (Sorry, little fellow.)

Replacing these goodies are practical fabrics which have the look and feel of the real thing. Items like wool-blend suits and jackets, cotton-blend shirts and pants which do not need ironing and multi-blends such as flax, cotton, linen, silk and polyester.

Thus, the now popular natural nubby look appears very authentic.

Lapels and neckties have been slimmed to reduce flapping in the breeze. The change is subtle — in fractions of inches — but apparent when the old and new are seen side by side.

Versatility is everywhere, even in the business suit. Major firms such as Sears and Levi Strauss now are offering suit pieces separately, so that our man may choose his jacket, vest and pants as he wishes, also mixing and matching as he sees fit.

"It's kind of amazing that the menswear industry has taken this long to latch onto the idea of separate components for men's suits," said Paul Rogers, a man who travels the world as Sears' chief menswear taste arbiter.

"After all, the idea isn't new. Separates have been a part of the women's sportswear scene since the early '70s and then moved on to men's sportswear some years ago."

The mix and match suit always has been a bargain for the enterprising man. He can select a suit with a jacket so that the jacket can double as a sportcoat to go with contrasting slacks.

Some firms are selling reversible vests to add to the variety.

Thus, we have versatility and less of a financial knock for the man who wants to be well dressed, but not bored or broke.

It's impossible to overestimate the importance of new fabrics in these style

changes. They mean that men's clothing lasts longer, looks better and that whoever does the family ironing doesn't have to spend nearly so many long hours over the steaming board.

The blended fabrics range from suits to slacks to sweaters to underwear and even to blue jeans.

The chemists at Levi Strauss have been doing things to their denim.

"We've developed a traditional-looking jean that feels like all cotton, but it's a blend," said Pat Gerber, of Levi. "This means that the jean lasts longer than all cotton. We've even managed to make the blended jean fade and age just like its older cousin."

Who can deny that natural aging is real progress, whether in champagne or blue jeans?



Easy manners for either city or country are popular.

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